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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Mideast

Key stories in the media:

The media reported that yesterday, Israel's Ambassador to the U.S. Michael Oren rejected recent assessments that Israel was planning an attack on Iran's nuclear facilities. In an interview with Fareed Zakaria on CNN, Oren also said: "The government of Israel has supported President Obama in his approach to Iran -- engagement and

outreach to Iran." According to the envoy, Iran is also involved in stirring up tensions in the Palestinian arena. The Jerusalem Post reported that PM Benjamin Netanyahu will be taking Europe's temperature during his upcoming trip to London and Berlin, on the possibility of imposing crippling sanctions on Iran if it refuses Washington's offer of engagement over its nuclear program.

Israel Radio quoted Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, now visiting Washington, as saying in an interview with the Egyptian daily Al-Ahram that he is putting the peace process on top of his agenda. Mubarak called on Israel to take practical steps such as a settlement freeze. The media reported that he will meet with Jewish American leaders while in the U.S.

The Jerusalem Post quoted Daniel Herschkowitz, the head of the Habayit Hayehudi (The Jewish Home) party, as saying yesterday, based on conversations with Netanyahu, that Netanyahu will reject President Obama's request for a freeze on natural growth in West Bank settlements.

Haaretz reported that residential trailers are playing a major role as West Bank settlers try to create facts on the ground before the U.S. and Israel reach any decision on a construction freeze in the settlements. In recent months, settlers have been trying to assemble trailers at a quickened pace.

The Jerusalem Post quoted Hamas leader Khaled Mashal as saying yesterday in an interview with the Qatari newspaper Al-Watan that Hamas is interested in opening a dialogue with the Obama administration because current U.S. policies are much better than those of former President George W. Bush. Mashal's remarks were published a day after Hamas foiled an attempt by a more radical Islamic group to establish an Islamic emirate in Gaza. Mashal also denied reports about progress in negotiations for Gilad Shalit's release.

The Jerusalem Post quoted Israeli officials as saying yesterday that the Defense Ministry is postponing the delivery of cement to Gaza out of fear that Hamas will get its hands on the material and use it to rebuild its military infrastructure damaged during Operation Cast Lead. Yesterday, mako.co.il, the online service of Channel 2-TV, reported that the IDF released documentation -- a film clip -- showing how Hamas fighters used Palestinian civilians as human shields in the course of Operation Cast Lead. The excerpt was published following recent criticism on the subject by human rights organizations.

Yesterday, The Jerusalem Post quoted senior Israeli officials as saying on August 15 that Jerusalem expects Lebanon and the international community to fully implement Security Council Resolution 1701.

Expanding on the issue of obstacles placed in the way of foreign nationals who enter Israel if they have family, work, business, or academic ties in the West Bank, The Jerusalem Post quoted an American citizen married to a Palestinian from Ramallah and who has a return ticket to the U.S. through Ben-Gurion Airport as saying that she was horrified to discover that she had been given one of the new limited entry stamps after visiting her in-laws in Jordan for a family wedding. The Jerusalem Post also cited information for travelers posted on the Web site of the U.S. Consulate-General that the Consulate can do nothing to assist in getting this visa status changed.

Haaretz reported that American Friends of Ateret Cohanim, a nonprofit organization that sends millions of shekels worth of donations to Israel every year for clearly political purposes, such as buying Arab properties in East Jerusalem, is registered in the U.S. as an organization that funds educational institutes in Israel.

The Jerusalem Post reported that a reception tonight, featuring former U.S. presidential hopeful Mike Huckabee at the Shepherd Hotel in Jerusalem, has turned into a hotly contested venue for protests both for and against Israeli policy in the area.

Over the weekend Israel Radio reported that Galilee farmers who found themselves in dire financial straits sold rights (through

intermediaries) to their privately-owned land to the highest bidder -- allegedly wealthy residents of the Gulf states.

Yediot reported on a project called Middle East Education through Technoogy (MEET), in which 120 high-school Israeli and Paestinian students meet during summer programs. he project is now in its sixth year.

HaQaretzreported that workers at the Negev Nuclear Researc Center in Dimona were made to drink uranium in 988 as part of an experiment, according to a lawsuit filed four months ago in the Beersheva Labor ribunal by a former worker at the facility.

Ove the weekend all media underscored a spate of cruel murders and other violent crimes.

Mideast:

Block Quotes:

II. "Quiet: Now Is the Time for a Solution"

Former Meretz leader and former Justice Minister Yossi Beilin wrote in the independent Israel Hayom (8/17): QWe would do well to remember August 2009. It is a moment that ostensibly we ought to be able to enjoy. The Israeli economy appears to have overcome the global economic crisis even before other economies, and the Tel Aviv Stock Exchange is breaking new heights. Hamas in Gaza has stopped firing rockets, and Hizbullah has opted to suffice with childish demonstrationsQso that the state of quiet has been maintained in the north as well. Abu Mazen succeeded in holding the Fatah Central Conference and became in its aftermath a leader with a stronger mandate to promote a meaningful political solution. The economic prosperity on the West Bank has been shown to us by nearly every media outlet: the night life in Nablus, the restaurants in Ramallah, the Palestinian children who go to Bat Yam and see, for the first time in their lives, the sea.... It would seem as if nothing were urgent and that we might now relax and wait to hear U.S. Special Envoy to the Middle East George MitchellQs offers and President Barack ObamaQs speech at the U.N. In the meantime, we might as well take a brief vacation. But that is precisely the same mistake that recurs nearly every summer, one decade after the next ever since the great victory of 1967.... Instead of trying to get a tan in the damaging rays of the sun, the government would do well to draft the Israeli peace initiative and to avert a situation in which August 2009 turns into an all-too-brief recess between the clouds of war.

II. "Palestinian State Is Not Synonym for Terrorist Entity"

Senior op-ed writer Akiva Eldar commented in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (8/17): QFor some reason [as far as official Israel is concerned] the continuedcalm on Israel's eastern border and the order Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad's government has imposed in cities the IDF has been good enough to evacuate have been unable to prove that the Palestinian state is not necessarily a synonym for a terrorist entity. Nine years after the outbreak of the Al-Aqsa Intifada and almost five years after Yasser Arafat's death, a solid Palestinian leadership is waiting for Israel. It's a leadership that speaks out and acts decisively against violence. The sixth Fatah convention approved a diplomatic solution based on two states within the 1967 borders. Although a mountainous 16 years of diplomatic process have produced a molehill, the option of returning to the armed struggle against the occupier has been pushed to the margins. The Palestinian leadership, as well as the countries of the Arab League, are showing understanding for Israel's concerns; our Palestinian neighbor will be immeasurably less armed and dangerous than our northern neighbors. We can only hope that its security forces will not abuse their new recruits and that their officers will not be liars.

III. "Nowhere to Go"

Columnist and former intelligence officer Amos Gilboa wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv (8/17): QFollowing the Fatah conference in Bethlehem last week, one can describe the political situation of the Palestinians with two simple English words: dead end. There is a zero chance of reaching a final status arrangement with the Palestinian anytime in the near future.... Analysts and politicians are telling us: There is hope. One can make a deal with this new Fatah leadership. And why is this? Because the conference stated that it was in favor of the peace option, that this was its path, that it favors the two-state solution.... These are false arguments.

The mere fact that the Palestinians make use of the secret words Qtwo-state solutionQ and QpeaceQ means absolutely nothing. They have been saying this since the Oslo Accords. So long as delegates to the Palestinian conference see a need to render their positions more extreme, this means they understand well where the wind is blowing in the Palestinian street. So where is all this heading? We will witness in the near future many ideas about some international conference or another, one or another American plan to reach an agreement. Just so long as activity is produced to conceal the sorry reality, and also to create a lot of headlines. And Israel? The best thing it can do is to publish its own initiative, and if not -- at least refrain from provocation and be sure to be coordinated with the Obama administration.

IV. "The Obama Prisoner-Release Doctrine"

Columnist Shmuel Rosner, who was HaQaretzQs correspondent in Washington, wrote in Maariv (8/17: "Here is an interesting exercise in Middle Eastern scriptwriting: A current or past senior Israeli or American official travels to Gaza. In complete contrast to official Israeli and American policy, he holds talks with the Hamas leadership.... He brings to Israel in his car the kidnapped soldier Gilad Shalit. Is anyone against this? This is not a bloated scenario -- not as far as Americans are concerned: Over the past two weeks similar events occurred on the other side of the planet. Former President Bill Clinton visited North Korea on an Qunofficial mission, but with the knowledge and the blessing of the Barack Obama administration. He returned with two captive female American journalists. There was criticism, but it was contained by the clicking of the cameras memorializing the returneesQ tears of joy. Over the past weekend, there was a repeat performance -- on a smaller scale: Burma (whose unrecognized name is Myanmar) is not more dangerous than North Korea. Senator Jim Webb isnQt as famous as Clinton. Nonetheless, Webb traveled to boycotted, extremist Burma, and returned with a nice booty: the American prisoner John Yettaw.... [Preconceptions] will fall like a stack of cards if the Hamas leaders decide to make one small gesture in exchange for such a brief encounter.... If this is happening in America -- which is rather indifferent to its prisonersQ fate -- all the more in Israel.

IV. QFatahQs Ticking Bomb

The Director of the Interdisciplinary Center's Global Research in International Affairs Center, columnist Barry Rubin, wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (8/17): QAs Fatah continues the conflict and blocks a resolution for years, they face lower living standards and destructive violence. If Fatah becomes more radical, as indicated by Abbas's choice for successor, the Palestinian people will suffer even more.... Fatah has apparently chosen as its next leader a man who rejects the 1993 Israel-PLO (Oslo) agreement and the ensuing peace process. Muhammad Ghneim was so passionately opposed even to negotiating with Israel that he refused to go to the Gaza Strip and West Bank with Arafat in 1994. He also refused to participate in the PA as long as it was involved in the peace process. So can Ghneim participate now because he has changed his mind, or rather -- as seems more likely -- that Fatah no longer takes the peace process seriously? This situation is equivalent to Russia picking a hard-line Stalinist as its next leader.... If Ghneim takes over, you can not only forget about peace -- which doesn't look too promising anyway -- but the status quo could also be jeopardized. The re-radicalization of Fatah might lead to a very big, even violent, sustained crisis. Attention must be paid to this development.

VI. QBreaking the Final Taboo

Security and intelligence affairs commentator Amit Cohen wrote in

the popular, pluralist Maariv (8/16): QHamas has faced a number of violent challenges since it seized power in the Gaza Strip. It emerged from all of them successfully. The al-Qaida operatives managed to hurt Hamas, but even they are no match for the Hamas security forces' superior numbers and weaponry. But as opposed to previous instances, this time Hamas wasn't fighting against a clan or an organization; rather, it was fighting against a competing religious doctrine, which is much harder to defeat. The struggle between the Muslim Brotherhood-to wit, Hamas and the Salafi-jihadi school, has been under way for many years across the Muslim world. The defeat in Rafah does not necessarily spell an end to the phenomenon.

The conflict between those two schools of religious thought is complex and profound. A large part of it stems from differing religious interpretation and beliefs about proper Muslim conduct -- and not from disagreements about Israel. From Israel's point of view, there is not much difference between the two schools. Hamas is prepared to speak about a cease-fire and a hudna, while the al-Qaida operatives reject such an option out of hand. But in terms of their long-term strategies, both of them believe in jihad as an inseparable part of their being. Still, to generalize, it is clear that Hamas is capable of showing more pragmatism. Hamas, for example, was willing to receive the former U.S. President, Jimmy Carter, as a VIP visitor to Gaza. Alternatively, the members of the Salafi school of thought had planned to assassinate Carter. They believe that figures such as Carter must not be tolerated. They believe that Hamas is groveling before the West, before Christianity, by accepting figure such as Carter or Tony Blair. They repudiate any notion of foreign relations or even foreign public relations. The only publicity they need is well-covered violence.

MORENO